DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 523 CS 217 642

AUTHOR Stone, Robin
TITLE Teaching Creativity Creatively: An Idea Journal.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Creative Teaching; *Creativity; Elementary Secondary Education; *Journal Writing; *Writing Assignments; *Writing Instruction; Writing Teachers
IDENTIFIERS *Idea Generation; *Writing Motivation

ABSTRACT

Writing classes ought to be among the most creative environments imaginable, but sadly, some writing teachers seem to think that their own writing ability, in proximity, is enough to get students started. A good writing teacher must be a constant student of creativity, always searching for new ways to teach, new inspirations, new forms of assignments, and always, encouraging the individual within the student. One recommendation is for the teacher to plan ahead and keep an idea journal or portfolio for those days when he or she did not sleep well or when "life is too crazy for rational thought." A few ideas that a teacher might consider adding to an idea journal are: the teacher provides the subject matter for student journals; students write about their daily routine in the third-person; teachers give students the opportunity to research and then write a short biographical piece on someone they admire ("hero-writing"); teachers ask students to research a subject, one that will produce statistics, and then write a 2-3 page paper on that topic; teachers can tie writing assignments in with the other subjects the students are studying; and teachers should take a writing class themselves from time to time. The important thing is to remember how satisfying writing is, how broadening, enlightening, inventive, and joyous it should be. (NKA)

ED 455 523

Teaching Creativity Creatively: An Idea Journal.

by Robin Stone

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. Stone
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS 217 642

Robin Stone
324 North Oregon Street
Yreka, CA 96097
530-842-0644
lechat@inreach.com

Teaching Creativity Creatively:

An Idea Journal

Creativity often consists of merely turning up what is already there.

--- Bernice Fitz-Gibbons
Former Director of Advertising;
Macy's Department Stores

Creativity is risk taking, making the effort, experimenting, mistake making, and rule breaking. Creativity is that light-bulb suddenly shining over your head, it's a sudden need to act so fast that you haven't got time to speak, it's that irresistable sudden idea, it's a magic ability, a total absorption. Most of all, however, creativity is *growth*.

All children are born with the ability to create, but, somehow, during the growing-up process, this ability is squashed or beaten down in far too many. Where would we be if Alexander Graham Bell's creativity had not been nurtured, or Albert Einstein's, Henry Ford's, Wolfgang Amadeaus Mozart's, Verde's, Rembrant's, Georges de la Tour's or Michelangelo di Buonarte's?

More to the point, and perhaps more importantly, where would we be without *creative* teachers? Think back to your own school years; which teacher do you remember the most fondly or gratefully? I'll bet he or she was the most creative teacher you had, someone who knew how to bring that same element

out in you, someone who knew how to inspire you, to help you to bring your ideas into fruition. Someone who knew how to let you be *you*.

Writing classes ought to be among the most creative environments imaginable, but they aren't all. Sadly, some writing teachers seem to think that their own writing ability, in proximity, is enough to get students started. Explaining the process alone is hardly sufficient. Others seem to have simply run out of fresh ideas, or maybe they've somehow lost interest. A good writing teacher must be a constant student of creativity, always searching for new ways to teach, new inspirations, new forms of assignments, and always, encouraging the individual within the student.

Ah, you say, *let's be practical; requiring oneself on a daily basis to ooze creativity is simply not possible*. True, true; we all have *those* days. That's why I strongly recommend both planning ahead and keeping an idea journal or portfolio for those days when you didn't sleep well, when your nose is runny, when your life is too crazy for rational thought. We all *do* have *those* days!

Getting an idea journal started for the writing classes that you're teaching ought to be fairly easy; you probably already have more than a few pages worth of great ideas. But the following are a few that you might consider adding, for that rainy day that seems to always loom ahead...

Getting the reluctant writer started. More journaling, but this time the journals belong to the students, and you, the teacher, will provide the subject matter. This can be something as simple as a new ad campaigne on telelvision, a current event from the local newspaper, something you see as you drive to work in the morning, a phrase that caught your attention on the radio as you dressed, a photo from a magazine, a piece from Chopin on your portable CD

player. This idea can come from *anything*, so be observant and be inventive. "Your journal subject for today is this photograph from The Smithsonian, what would it be like to be in a wheelchair, your opinion on the mayoral election, the funding of the college's new building, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera." The subject possibilities are literally endless for these journals, so look around you and be imaginative.

Another starter, a real ice-breaker, is to have your students write about their daily routine in third-person reference. For example, you might ask your students to write about themselves merely as neutral observers, but you might also choose to ask them to write as if they were their own mothers, watching their every move, or as if they were alien visitors to our planet, trying to figure out *why* this or that is being done. Use your imagination! This is often a fun exercise that allows the student to laugh at him or herself in retrospect; it can give a novel view of one's daily routine. You might choose to require humor or not; it's your class, after all!

Yet another idea for getting your writing students started, and one I would strongly recommend, is "hero-writing"; giving your students the opportunity to research and then write a short biographical piece on someone they greatly admire and consider to be a "hero". You'll need no guidelines here other than to ask your students to choose a living or historical figure, and to stress that their choice ought to reflect who they, personally, consider to be a hero. Making your students feel that their opinions have value will only serve to strengthen the bond you share with them, and it will help to build their confidence in themselves as writers, as well. And, an added benefit to this assignment is that your hours spent grading these papers ought to be unusally interesting!

For building confidence in an insecure writer, you might try the following: ask your class to research a subject, one that will produce statistics, and then write a two or three page paper on that topic. For this I would suggest offering one subject to the entire class or a choice of only two or three. You might consider breaking your class into groups to do the research. Make the subject choice something that is new to your students, if possible, so that they'll have the opportunity to learn about something as they work through the project; this will make it more interesting. One suggestion I'd like to offer for subject matter is this: there are dozens of countries in our world that we rarely know much about; choosing one of those smaller, less "news-worthy" global locations for the subject will offer your students a valuable opportunity to become more familiar with another part of our world. That's only one idea, however; there are as many subject choices for this activity as there are teachers! This assignment is at least a two step procedure; you should require to see the research notes, as well, and then offer suggestions if you see a need.

Another method for building confidence, which offers the possibility for real enthusiasm, is to tie your writing assignments in with the other subjects your students are studying. This method, broadly presented here, is called "Thematic Units", or "Integrated Units", and advocates cross-subject teaching in elementary schools. However, if your high school or college students are taking classes on psychology, history, science, or, maybe anthropolgy, and are offered the chance to work on a paper that will serve for both your writing class and another, they'll jump at it! You and the teachers of the other classes will all receive better papers because of this effort, and the students will have a doubled opportunity to learn. Integrating your class with others and, therefore,

using what is pertinent to your students is important, and if they feel that they've been given an opportunity to earn a higher grade, well, *fantastic*!

And last, but certainly not least, you, yourself, ought to take a writing class from time to time. Finding a class that interests you doesn't have to be difficult or expensive; you can find a myriad of writing classes offered by accredited institutions available over the internet these days. You can sit at home, in your flannel bathrobe, with a cup of coffee beside you and take a class in creative writing, or technical writing, if that's what you should choose to do. But, for an educator to refresh and gain inspiration from a new learning experience, this is a must. It also helps us to be inventive and to keep up with what's new, and that's very important, too. You can never tell what new element of your own abilities this experience will bring to the surface. And remember to observe *your* teacher carefully for new ideas and methods, because we can all learn from each other, both *do's* and *don'ts*.

Most of all, I think, it's important to remember how satisfying writing is, how broadening, enlightening, inventive and joyous it should be. And never forget that you are giving the marvelous gift of self expression and creativity to your students, a gift that will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

And, have fun!

Note: *More on Thematic Units can be found in an excellent article written by Sylvia Vardell, available online at* http://www.ncte.org/teach/Vardell9069.html.